

PHILIP ENGLISH, COMMERCE BUILDER

BY HENRY W. BELKNAP

AMONG the outstanding names in the history of early New England few are to be found of more romantic interest than that of Philip English whose unbelievably rapid rise to prominence in Salem indicates a character and intelligence possessed by few and surpassed by none.

He can rightly be called the foundation stone of mercantile business in the Colonies and it was the long series of his account books, owned by the Essex Institute, and the frequent references to be found in all the records of his day that inspired a thorough search of all known sources and prompted the writing of the book from which this account has been condensed.

The record of his baptism in the Island of Jersey had long been known and it seemed worth while to make a search there for what might be found to throw light upon the family. Accordingly, Mr. Charles A. Bernau, himself a native of the island and a trained researcher, was sent there where he very soon unearthed records which carried the line well back into the sixteenth century but the great success was the finding, among the archives of the Société Jersiaise, of a quantity of notebooks kept by Dr. Philip L'Anglois some fifty years ago, one of which concerned his own family.

In 1694 Falle in his History of Jersey says "In this Island are many very ancient Families, not only among the Seigneurs, and Gentlemen of the first rank, but even among those of Inferior Quality, several of whom can reckon a Descent, which in some other Countries, very good Gentlemen would be proud of."

The name of L'Anglois doubtless dates from the settlement in Normandy of an Englishman who

became known as John the Englishman. Hugo Anglieus is mentioned as living near Barneville and in 1225, in the Close Rolls, reference is made to the arrest in Guernsey of a cargo of "wines belonging to Pierre L'Anglais of Caen in Normandy." In 1274 Philip le Englés held land at St. Peter Port, Guernsey, and a Robert le Engleys owed the King two loaves and two capons, annual rent of his house in that parish. In Jersey the surname is found as early as 1309 and in 1445 Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, Lord of the Channel Islands, granted to Richard Lenglez, of the parish of St. Laurence, Jersey, a license to erect a square Colombier, or dove-cot, on payment of a capon annually at Christmas. This was a feudal privilege, very jealously guarded and they could only be built on fiefs of the nobility under Norman law, to which the Jersey law strictly conformed. I have an excellent photograph of this Colombier, which still stands.

For the sake of brevity it is necessary to omit references to a long list of interesting items relating to this family but it is very evident that, not only had they been long established on the Island but they were among the most important people.

John L'Anglois, born before 1619/20, settled about 1641 in the parish of Trinity, where he had five children baptized up to 1651 and, since in each case a DeCarteret was among the godparents, it may be assumed that his wife was of that very distinguished family. The last of these children was Philip Lenglois, baptized 30 July 1651, whose godparents were Sir Philip DeCarteret and his wife, DeCarteret being Seigneur of St. Ouen. These DeCarterets were the leading family in the Island, having been established there for a thousand years.

Tradition, as usual doubtful and often incorrect, has it that Philip landed in New England in 1670; however, the first mention of him in public records is in 1674 when his future wife deposed that he had sold her uncle a hogshead of brandy to be paid for in fish when he came from the eastward. According to the

same tradition it is picturesquely stated that at the age of nineteen he had run away from home and landed here penniless, that Mrs. William Hollingsworth, whose husband was a merchant, had seen him passing and evidently in distress, had invited him in and fed him and that he remained with the Hollingsworths, five years later marrying their daughter. I beg leave to doubt very much a part of that story for in January of 1674 he was in the Island of Jersey, officiating as godfather for his nephew Philip and in command of a vessel. Evidently he had returned by May of that year as it was then that Mary Hollingsworth testified as to the brandy and that he sold it on his own account is clear since he was to be paid in fish. Doubtless he had brought the brandy back with him on his return from the Island. Tradition again says that because of his absconding and of his marriage he was disinherited. Two points can be made against this, firstly, that were he in disgrace as a runaway he would hardly have been selected as sponsor for his nephew and, secondly, under the Jersey law disinheritance was impossible, still is, as it was not customary to make wills and property was divided along fixed lines.

In 1676 he was again in Jersey in the "Speedwell" shallop, bound for the Isle of May for a cargo of salt for New England, having sailed from Maryland.

As already stated, he married Mary Hollingsworth in 1675 and upon her death in 1697/8 I was able to prove from an entry in his books that he married Sara, daughter of John and Sara (Young) Marsh, whose identity has not been hitherto known. She was the widow of Samuel Ingersoll and there is no record of her death. Perhaps the purchase of "boards for a coffin" in 1723 in a guardianship account of Philip English, jr. may indicate her death as it corresponds with no other known death in the family.

The Hollingsworths had been in Salem since 1635, when Richard senior was granted land on the south side of Salem Neck, where he had a shipyard and ran the ferry to Marblehead Neck, landing at Naugus

Head. He was, according to his son, the first builder of vessels in Salem. The grant was for five hundred acres "where he can find it."

In 1674 William Hollingsworth was in Virginia whence he wrote his wife that he had found a good husband for their daughter Mary to which she replied that he might save himself the trouble since she had already given her to English. He was lost at sea in 1677 and was not, as has been stated, killed by Indians.

What was probably a profitable side of English's business and one cause of his repeated visits to Jersey was the importation of natives of the Island as indentured servants or apprentices, whose services he sold to tradesmen or householders in Salem and elsewhere and it is due to this that, especially in Marblehead, there are to be still found so many of the Jersey family names.

As early as 1675 Philip was acquiring property adjoining that owned by William Hollingsworth, as well as in other places and in 1683 he prepared to build what was one of the most imposing mansions in the town on the present English street and near the "Blue Anchor" inn owned by Mrs. Hollingsworth which she conveyed to her daughter Mary in 1684/5. English's son Philip owned and ran the tavern after his mother's death and he was still there in 1748, when he sold the tavern, wharf and warehouse to Richard Derby.

The ever graphic Dr. William Bentley gives an extended account of this house which stood until between 1833 and 1834. Most of what he says was told him by English's great grand-daughter. It was the largest dwelling in town and was known as "the forty peaked house" in which "even the cellars were plastered." This portion of the shore was at that time known as the Point of Rocks. At the time of the death of Mrs. Susanna (Touzel) Hathorne, the great granddaughter, Dr. Bentley had an opportunity to look over most of her possessions, among which were many things that had been owned by both the Hollingsworth and English families, evidently a huge quantity

of books, furniture, plate and so forth. Quite a number of the articles he mentions have now found their way into the museum of the Essex Institute. The scale upon which the establishment was run is indicated by the fact that some twenty servants were employed.

English served the town in some official capacities. He was constable in 1683, selectman four years between 1692 and 1716 and representative to the General Court in 1700. He seems to have been overfond of litigation as he was frequently in Court and seldom appears to have accepted an adverse verdict until he had carried the case to the high Courts.

There is abundant evidence in the account books that not only by purchase but by building at the Hollingsworth shipyard and elsewhere English made use of many vessels in carrying on his trading. In 1680 a ketch was building for him in Rowley where it was the custom to build vessels on the common, in the centre of the town, which were moved on skids or wheels across the marshes to the beach for launching. It may have been the ketch "John" which made her maiden voyage to Bilboa and France. At least a part of the time she was commanded by Philip English.

As we all know, the unhappy episode of the witchcraft delusion was no respecter of persons of standing in the community and there is but little doubt that many of its victims were those who in some manner had incurred the jealousy or hatred of their fellow-townsmen who, by accusation, were able to vent their spite. That the English family should have been attacked is not greatly to be wondered at for their style of living, wealth and general prosperity must have produced a feeling of envy in many breasts and it may well be that they were guilty of some arrogance of manner. Then, too, the fact that they were adherents of the Episcopal Church gave a certain faction of the town dissatisfaction so that all in all it was natural that Mrs. English should have been visited by the sheriff with a warrant for her arrest late one night or

early one morning, according to which account one accepts. At all events she was in bed and as she declined to arise a guard was set over the house and after she arose at her usual hour and had breakfasted she went with the officers to the "Cat and Wheel" tavern or the Jail (again authorities differ), and was locked up for six weeks.

Apparently at some period there must have been many Court papers abstracted from the files as few can be found concerning the English case so that certain details are doubtful because different stories are found in print; however six weeks after Mrs. English was locked up, her husband, who had made it a practice to visit her frequently in the place of imprisonment, was also accused and confined.

They were able to command sufficient influence to secure their transfer to Boston and, if Bentley was correct, to be merely lodged and not confined in the jail. The Rev. Joshua Moodey, who had been preaching in Portsmouth, New Hampshire since 1658, had made trouble for himself by his liberal views and had not only been imprisoned for thirteen weeks but was forbidden to resume preaching. He removed to Boston where he spoke very boldly in favor of the Englishes and denounced the witchcraft mania, which brought down upon him another storm so that he returned to Portsmouth where matters had quieted down. After nine weeks in Boston the day before the Englishes were to be returned to Salem for trial they listened to a sermon by Mr. Moodey on the text "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another" and upon his visiting them afterwards he urged them to escape. Upon English's demurring at the idea Moodey assured him that if he refused to take his wife away, he, Moodey, would do so, that all arrangements had been made and the matter taken up with Governor Fletcher in New York so it would appear that Philip was at last persuaded to go. They reached New York or perhaps somewhere on Long Island in safety, their departure, it is said, winked at by the authorities, and were there

for about a year, when, as the confusion had subsided, they returned to Salem.

So little vindictiveness did Mr. English display toward the town of Salem that, while he was in New York, hearing of destitution among the poor, he sent a vessel-load of potatoes for distribution.

They were welcomed back to Salem but their actual welcome at home must have been a sorry one as, according to the law, the sheriff had seized everything he could lay his hands upon and the fine house was practically a wreck. It was not until 1711 that any attempt was made to reimburse those whose property had been confiscated and then the Legislature set aside £600 to cover everything! Philip English alone figured his losses at £1183:02:00 beside a quantity of things, household goods and so on, which he was unable to enumerate. The items given in his list are all those of his stock in trade. He was still trying for further indemnification in 1722 and, possibly because even then his mind may have been somewhat affected, foreshadowing the greater breakdown a few years later, he was presented by the Grand Jury for slanderous remarks concerning the clergy and justices, calling them robbers and murderers.

He was also from time to time in trouble, even jailed, for refusing to pay his rates for support of the Church and for years was accustomed, weather permitting, to row across to Marblehead to attend service at St. Michael's. Testimony was brought out to show that any irregularity in his attendance there was caused by inability to cross the harbor. In 1733 he, his sons Philip and John and his daughter Mary with her husband William Browne sold, for five shillings, the piece of land on the present St. Peter street to those who were appointed as a committee to build an Episcopal church in Salem, the present St. Peter's Church.

Mrs. English never recovered from the strain and exposure during the witchcraft excitement and she died in 1697 at the age of forty-two.

Philip's indomitable character is shown by his

proceeding, as soon as he returned to Salem, again to build up his business and restore things to normality. That he did so there is no question but when his mind began to fail and a guardian was appointed there were not only heavy expenses in administering the estate but the son Philip, evidently somewhat at odds with his father, could have been of little help and there must have been great shrinkage. His real estate was inventoried at £2440 and his wearing apparel at £2:11:00. After deducting debts there was a balance of £839 and sundry expenses were deducted from this before final settlement. John, the son by the second marriage, died in 1746 so Philip was the only one to perpetuate the name. Mary Browne was the only surviving daughter.

As with most of the early merchants on the New England coast the main staple in trade was fish. Fish passed as currency, was used to pay wages, caused many voyages to distant islands for salt, and the spoiled and refuse made good fertilizer. A large proportion of the items in the accounts and cargoes found in English's account books cover either fish or fishing tackle and many of the disputes in the Courts concerned matters connected with the industry. Rum, molasses and sugar bulked large in the homeward voyages, while barrels and barrel staves, another large item, were chiefly wanted for fish.

Considering the confusion in English's affairs during the witchcraft period it is not strange that most of the entries in the books relate to the period after 1692, which is most unfortunate, although one large volume dates from 1679 to 1690; however, it is still stranger that so much material should have been preserved regarding the first important merchant in Salem. These books have been copied verbatim and complete except for certain small parts which, either through mutilation or more than ordinarily obscure writing and spelling, cannot be read. A considerable amount of data has been found among the Hathorne Family manuscripts as well as odds and ends in other collections.

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